

THE HONOURABLE BILLY

BY RUBY M. AYRES

Illustrated by C. D. BATCHELOR

A Pair of Fair-Weather Friends, an Old Rich Lord, a Bored Aunt and a Charming and Mysterious Girl Give Billy an Exciting Month

THE Hon. Billy stuck out his long legs and stared at his rather large, patent-shod feet with morose eyes.

"Broke!" he said with tragic eloquence, and looked across the fireplace pathetically at the man who sat opposite him.

The man in the armchair opposite was looking at Billy with eyes that were not altogether friendly.

"Miss Eyed would have you any day for the asking, and she's worth a quarter of a million. It would be a bit of far for you, my boy. Wish I'd the chance."

The Hon. Billy flushed. At that very moment a pink, highly scented letter lay in his breast pocket from Vi Chalonner, the woman upon whom he had squandered his substance; a nicely worded letter, politely intimating that she no longer had need of him.

The Hon. Billy brought his clenched fist down with a thump on his big knee.

"I'll marry no woman for her money," he said fiercely. "I may be a fool, but I'm not such a cur as that. Besides, I've done with women."

The man in the deep chair looked at his watch and heaved himself lazily to his feet.

"Well, you won't mind if I run away, will you?" he promised to go and lounge out of the room.

Instinct told the Hon. Billy that the friendship between himself and Ralph Furnival was at an end.

He sat for a long time staring into the glowing fire.

So Furnival was going to dine with the Chalonners! Billy could picture the scene so well. Vi Chalonner radiating in beautiful, shaded lamplight, possibly talking of him and his downfall in the careless, cold way in which she had heard of so many other poor devils.

"Poor Billy!" He could almost hear her say. "Poor old Billy! But he wasn't he."

The Hon. Billy clenched his teeth and swore in his heart that he was not beaten yet.

Many a better man than he had gone broke and survived it.

THE day should yet come when he would show Vi Chalonner and Furnival that his was not a friendship to be lightly thrown aside.

The Hon. Billy thrust the pink, scented note down in the flames, holding it there with his foot till nothing was left but powdered ash.

He left with her—done with her. And because of her treatment of him he had done with all women forever. Some one knocked softly at the door.

"Please, sir, a lady to see you," the Hon. Billy turned round as if he had been shot.

"She won't give no name, sir," the man went on almost resentfully. "But she says as it's most important."

"I can't see her," said the Hon. Billy snappily.

"I'll be in out—ill—dead—anything you like."

"I've told her all that, sir, and she says she will not go till she sees you."

"Oh, rubbish!" said the Hon. Billy. "It's a switch by the mantle shelf and flooded the room with light."

"Show her in," he growled.

The girl who entered was very young; his second that she was very beautiful; his third that she was Vi Chalonner, whose portraits on post cards adorned nearly every shop window in London.

"Good evening," she said.

The Hon. Billy bowed, but did not move forward.

"I beg pardon," he began, but she interrupted.

"I haven't come to sell you anything, that is what you think, and I don't want you to give me any money. She paused, and added with a little wavering smile: "I want to give you some."

"I beg pardon," said the Hon. Billy blantly.

She laughed outright now.

"I know it sounds silly, but—may I show you?"

"Please," said the Hon. Billy.

He drew forward the chair which Furnival had left, and the girl dropped into it.

The Hon. Billy stood looking down at her with an air of bewilderment.

The girl turned her head suddenly.

"Are you engaged to be married?" she asked.

"Oh, I say," he ejaculated at last, helplessly.

"Of course, you think I am out of my mind," she said cheerfully, "but indeed, I am not. You see, if you're not engaged I want you to be engaged to me."

"That isn't what I'm afraid of," said the Hon. Billy. "It's ever so many things that I'm afraid of."

She flushed a little.

"I liked the look of you, for one thing, and—"

"Have we met before, then? I'm sure I should not have forgotten you if we had."

She made a little grimace.

"I have seen you, anyway, many times; and, as I say, I liked the look of you; but there was another reason, too."

He paused attentively, waiting to hear it.

"It's this," she said at length, slowly. "There is a man—oh, I don't know his name, but he is a friend of yours."

"It is impossible to guess which of my friends she referred to."

"Pardon me," the Hon. Billy said hesitatingly, "but this man, he, of course, is your real reason for wishing—to get into society, as you call it?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you won't tell me who the chap is?" he submitted.

She shook her head.

He looked at her appraisingly; whatever else she might be, she was undoubtedly a lady, and for all her self-assurance she looked so young and frail.

"I can't do it," he said resolutely.

"I'm sorry, but you must see that it's impossible, for your sake as well as my own."

She started to her feet with a little cry of distress.

"I'll tell you how much it means to me—my whole life's happiness."

There was no mistaking her earnestness.

"Look here," said the Hon. Billy with blunt directness. "You seem to forget what a scandal there'd be if I were to do this."

"I know it sounds silly, but—may I show you?"

"Please," said the Hon. Billy.

He drew forward the chair which Furnival had left, and the girl dropped into it.

The Hon. Billy stood looking down at her with an air of bewilderment.

The girl turned her head suddenly.

"Are you engaged to be married?" she asked.

"Oh, I say," he ejaculated at last, helplessly.

"Of course, you think I am out of my mind," she said cheerfully, "but indeed, I am not. You see, if you're not engaged I want you to be engaged to me."

"That isn't what I'm afraid of," said the Hon. Billy. "It's ever so many things that I'm afraid of."

She flushed a little.

"I liked the look of you, for one thing, and—"

"Have we met before, then? I'm sure I should not have forgotten you if we had."

She made a little grimace.

"I have seen you, anyway, many times; and, as I say, I liked the look of you; but there was another reason, too."

He paused attentively, waiting to hear it.

"It's this," she said at length, slowly. "There is a man—oh, I don't know his name, but he is a friend of yours."

"It is impossible to guess which of my friends she referred to."

"Pardon me," the Hon. Billy said hesitatingly, "but this man, he, of course, is your real reason for wishing—to get into society, as you call it?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you won't tell me who the chap is?" he submitted.

She shook her head.

nately, until quite recently, have been in greatly reduced circumstances. However, the luck has changed and Phil has blossomed out. She—here she comes, so you can judge for yourself."

Lady Mary introduced them in her bored way.

"Phil, dear Mr. Furnival, a great friend of Billy's."

Furnival bowed. Where on earth had he met this girl before? The shuttle of thought revolved bafflingly in his brain.

"Billy has spoken about you," she was saying carelessly. She took the letter from her pocket and handed it to him. "Kindly do as I tell you."

The Hon. Billy bowed ironically and walked away in the wake of the tall man.

But the Hon. Billy did not move. "I would rather not, if you will excuse me," he said.

"Rather not!" he echoed haughtily. "When I have requested you to do so, please do as I ask immediately."

Billy thrust out his underjaw in bulldog fashion.

"The man's not a suitable acquaintance for you."

"I am the best judge of that," a footman served coffee and retired; Lady Mary yawned.

"I don't know you, I was so tired. I dare say Billy has lots to say to you. Don't sit up long, it's late."

Phil stood by the fire, the toes of her slippers shining on the fender.

"Why did you leave without us tonight?" she asked at length.

"Because I object to seeing you on friendly terms with Lord Seldon," he said in his deep, hoarse voice. "Or perhaps I should say that I object to my fiancée making herself conspicuous with you."

"That is a pity, seeing that I am going to Prince's with him tomorrow," he said, looking at his watch. "I know, he is one of the finest skaters in London."

Billy was white with anger.

"I absolutely forbid you to go," he said furiously. "As long as you are associated with that scoundrel, I forbid you to have anything to do with Seldon."

She swung round, raising her gray eyes to his angry face.

"Why?" she asked directly. "Are you jealous? Do you love me? Or are you only jealous of your name?"

Billy turned scarlet; the suddenness of the attack disarmed him.

"Because I am a man," he said, and he said violently, "I could tell you enough about him to prove—"

"You could tell me nothing that I don't already know," he said.

The Hon. Billy caught his breath hard.

"You mean you have met him before?"

"No, I have never spoken to him in all my life until this evening."

She laughed contemptuously.

"You think—oh, how absurd it all happens you think—"

"Ours is purely a business relation. What is it to do with you how I spend my time? For two months you will be free of me."

She spoke defiantly.

"I will be free of you now! I will publish it in the papers tomorrow that our engagement is at an end."

She was deadly white now.

"You can be as insulting as you choose, but I am afraid of you. Do as you threaten, and I will publish the whole story of our agreement—"

"I have said to Lady Mary, it will make interesting reading for your friends, will it not?"

Phil laughed and raised her head.

"You're jealous," she said. Sudden daring filled her animated face.

"Jealous because I am in love with you, and think it beneath you to admit it. You're an honorable and blue-blooded, even if you are going to take my money! And I'm just nobody—jumped up from nothing—helping my position because of your help."

She broke off, frightened at the expression of the Hon. Billy's face.

"Jealous! In love with you?" He laughed discordantly. "I am afraid you are making a mistake. I am not the shrank back from room without another word."

The Hon. Billy turned on his heel and strode away.

Lady Mary, returning cautiously a moment later, found the room empty.

It was but a few moments before Billy returned; the tall, military-looking man followed at his heels.

"Miss Clyne, may I present Lord Seldon?"

The girl was looking up at the man bowing before her, with eager excitement.

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her.

"The Hon. Billy stooped, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

Phil stood, and picked up Phil's program which had fallen from her lap; with a firm hand he deliberately crossed out his name against four dances that he was going to come, then he returned it to her."

brought him, and bent over Phil's hand as a last good-bye.

"I'll be back tomorrow," he said. Phil's hand was cold, and the car glided away.

"And whom have you danced with all the evening?" Lady Mary asked, as they sped homeward.

Phil drew her white cloak a little more closely round her slim figure.

"I danced several with Mr. Rayburnworth," she said. "And then Billy introduced Lord Seldon."

"My dear!" and Billy disapproves of Lord Seldon's dancing.

"I know," he objected at first. But I simply insisted; and, after all, he's a very charming man."

"He is a very charming old man," said Lady Mary. She leaned back and closed her eyes.

"Tonight, when the two women entered Billy's drawing room, there was a huge fire roaring in the wide chimney, and the Hon. Billy, a light burning in his eyes, was sitting on his usually good-natured face."

He laid the cloths and wraps; a footman served coffee and retired; Lady Mary yawned.

"I don't know you, I was so tired. I dare say Billy has lots to say to you. Don't sit up long, it's late."

Phil stood by the fire, the toes of her slippers shining on the fender.

"Why did you leave without us tonight?" she asked at length.

"Because I object to seeing you on friendly terms with Lord Seldon," he said in his deep, hoarse voice. "Or perhaps I should say that I object to my fiancée making herself conspicuous with you."

"That is a pity, seeing that I am going to Prince's with him tomorrow," he said, looking at his watch. "I know, he is one of the finest skaters in London."

Billy was white with anger.

"I absolutely forbid you to go," he said furiously. "As long as you are associated with that scoundrel, I forbid you to have anything to do with Seldon."

She swung round, raising her gray eyes to his angry face.

"Why?" she asked directly. "Are you jealous? Do you love me? Or are you only jealous of your name?"

Billy turned scarlet; the suddenness of the attack disarmed him.

"Because I am a man," he said, and he said violently, "I could tell you enough about him to prove—"

"You could tell me nothing that I don't already know," he said.

The Hon. Billy caught his breath hard.

"You mean you have met him before?"

"No, I have never spoken to him in all my life until this evening."

She laughed contemptuously.

"You think—oh, how absurd it all happens you think—"

"Ours is purely a business relation. What is it to do with you how I spend my time? For two months you will be free of me."

She spoke defiantly.

"I will be free of you now! I will publish it in the papers tomorrow that our engagement is at an end."

She was deadly white now.

"You can be as insulting as you choose, but I am afraid of you. Do as you threaten, and I will publish the whole story of our agreement—"

"I have said to Lady Mary, it will make interesting reading for your friends, will it not?"

Phil laughed and raised her head.

"You're jealous," she said. Sudden daring filled her animated face.

"Jealous because I am in love with you, and think it beneath you to admit it. You're an honorable and blue-blooded, even if you are going to take my money! And I'm just nobody—jumped up from nothing—helping my position because of your help."

She broke off, frightened at the expression of the Hon. Billy's face.

"Jealous! In love with you?" He laughed discordantly. "I am